

LUTHERAN  
WOMAN  
TODAY

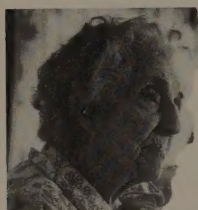
MARCH 1988

CALLED  
TO  
DISCIPLE-

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NEW AGE

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### *AIDS: Africa's Worst Threat?*

AIDS has become so prevalent in Africa that health-care professionals are wondering if the disease may leave the continent underpopulated before the end of the century.

According to a recent report in the **Los Angeles Times**, British researchers have found that "a high percentage of Africans possess a genetic variation that helps them to leave them especially defenseless against the AIDS virus."

Additionally, many African children have contracted the disease through blood transfusions used to counteract malaria-induced anemia. The disease can be transmitted through contaminated needles used in the transfusion procedure even if the blood supply is AIDS-

### *Amniocentesis Abuse Reported in India*

Amniocentesis, a technique developed to detect over 70 genetic diseases in unborn babies, is causing an alarming number of gender-linked abortions in India.

Because amniocentesis can also discern the sex of the unborn, healthy female fetuses are routinely aborted in a society which prizes male babies over females. In a country struggling with problems of overpopulation, amniocentesis is almost always followed by abortion if the fetus is female. A study of 8000 abortion cases showed that 7999 involved a female fetus.

*Continued on next page*

## *Asian Lutheran Women Press for Ordination*

Recently 50 Lutheran women from Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong met to discuss feminist theology and press for women's ordination in their churches.

Kwok Pui-Lan, a lecturer in theology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, urged the participants to "Weave new patterns that will liberate ourselves and sustain our faith." She suggested that feminist theology is "developed from women's participation in social reforms such as the anti-foot-binding movement, literacy campaigns and health programs in China in the late nineteenth century."

Kwok urged the Chinese church women to "endow each other with vision to search for a theology which tries to bear witness to the unceasing yearning of human beings for freedom and justice, and articulates the human compassion for peace and reconciliation."

## *Women Missionaries' Oral History Project Progresses*

An oral history project aimed at preserving the stories of early women missionaries is continuing after the completion of the first stage of the project.

The 27 women interviewed ranged in age from 76 to 94 years old. They had worked, on the average, 31 years in South Africa, China, or Colombia.

The interview tapes and an 830-page narrative are now available to read and listen to at the American Lutheran Church archives at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary. Copies of the bound narratives are also in the libraries of Wartburg, Trinity, and Luther Northwestern seminaries.

All of the women "had a strong faith in God and in Jesus as Lord and Savior," says Solveig Swendseid, project coordinator and former missionary from the American Lutheran Church to Japan. "It didn't matter what circumstances they had to face because they had a deep abiding, and firm commitment to their work, and they knew that God was with them there."

The second stage of the project, which 43 women born between 1900 and 1920 will be interviewed, is now under way. In the third stage, 100 women born on or after 1921 will be interviewed.

## *Orthodox Women Question Liturgical Practices*

Verna Harrison, an American Orthodox theologian, has begun to question some Orthodox liturgical practices which exclude women.

For example, "when a baby is baptized, the priest carries him through the royal doors and around the altar. This is not done for a baby girl," she says.

Another matter involves excluding women from communion when they are menstruating. "Excluding a woman from communion for this reason implies that her female body is, as such, impure or sinful, and separates her from God. One who created it," she says.

Carol Birkland

Carol Birkland is Middle East Secretary in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Division for Global Missions.



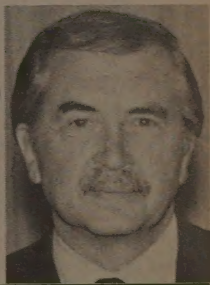
## CONTRIBUTORS

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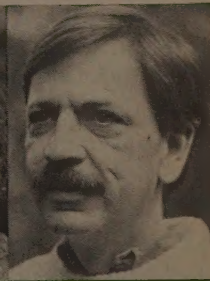
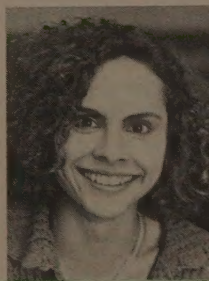
**Ylvisaker Nilsen**, of Iowa City, Iowa, who explores being "Called to discipleship" from the Women of the A purpose statement (see p. 6), is a writer of religious curriculum materials. Her novel **When the Bough Breaks: Finding the Family Tree** was published by Harper and Row.



**Ida and Bob Bertram**, subjects of reflections on a Commuter marriage," share a marriage and strong commitments to their respective ministries and careers, she as a librarian at Washington University in St. Louis and as a professor at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.



**E. Calderón** and **Thomas E. Kadel** bring distinctly different backgrounds to the Passion Sunday meditation in this issue's "Season's Best." Calderón, a native Puerto Rican, has most recently served as Spanish editor of the Philadelphia-based **Lutheran** magazine. Kadel, of Ambler, Pennsylvania, is a Lutheran pastor (Upper Dublin Lutheran Church), writer, and counselor.



# LETTERS

Thank you for bringing out a superb Vol. 1 No. 1 magazine.

The cover was so exhilarating. Even though I have never nor will ever climb mountains—the symbolism is great.

Layout, articles and previews all enticing.

*Evelyn Egbert  
Minneapolis, MN*

I received my new **Lutheran Woman Today** magazine, and I am sure disappointed with it. They told us it would be a bigger book. Well it is a little bit bigger, but it has such dim, thin-printed words that a person can hardly read it, and it costs more. I know you have a bigger book, but I do not want that one. They cost too much.

The pages, or paper that this new book is made of glares when the light shines on it. Sure hope you can make a better book next month.

*Mrs. Henry R. DeWall  
Pocahontas, IA*

This noon when my first copy arrived I was so eager to read it that I dropped everything, forgetting about the presents I was wrapping and the cards I was writing.

You are all to be highly commended on the format and contents. I am impatient to absorb all of it, page by page. I was so pleased to see you included book reviews because we church librarians rely on that department to help with selection and promotion.

*Marcella von Goertz  
Duluth, MN*

It is with joy that we looked over and read the first issue of **Lutheran Woman Today**. It is new, yet it feels familiar.

However, it is difficult to read for many elderly. The type is too condensed, too narrow of pitch. It is large enough, but not bold enough, so that the eyes strain and become tired.

*The Rev. John R. Meyer  
Hastings, NE*

Congratulations on an outstanding first issue of **Lutheran Woman Today**.

The make-up was colorful, attractive, clean-cut and pleasing to the eye as well as easily legible. The several articles were well-written, interesting and forward-looking. I read the magazine from cover to cover.

*The Rev. Reynold N. Johnson  
(retired)  
Minneapolis, MN*

I looked forward with much anticipation to the new magazine. It arrived, I opened it and made an immediate discovery: If you had done your very best to choose a type and format to not only discourage readers but to make the magazine almost impossible to read, you could not have succeeded more.

Without expressing my own opinion, I asked several ladies the question: What do you think of the "New **Scopus**"? The first answer was usually "I've tried to read it!" All seemed unhappy and discouraged and indicated they would most likely *not* read the magazine.

Please keep in mind that many ladies of the church are older women—at least



t forty—whose eyes are no longer as  
rp as they were (and for whom the  
ge light print is no improvement) but  
o are extremely interested in Bible  
dy.

Rakel L. Erickson  
Mentor, MN

e first issue of **Lutheran Woman To-**  
y arrived today. It is splendid! I am ea-  
to read each and every page. Alas,  
my dismay the last page or back cov-  
page has the lovely logo with the pur-  
e statement superimposed.

How can I register dismay with the  
all print used in the purpose state-  
nt? It is too small. No consideration  
s given to the visually impaired in de-  
ning the cards. Please make note that  
ur magazine is very nicely laid out—  
y to read etc.

Nita Chevalier  
Batavia, IL

ank you for your efforts on the new  
mat of **Lutheran Woman Today**. The  
gazine is most appealing and the  
ject matter is informative and inter-  
ng.

The article "Tied Together" by Bar-  
a K. Lundblad gave me much food  
thought. I have had many questions  
ncerning the rationale of the femin-  
research regarding the gender of  
d. I have heard speakers who also al-  
e to this type of thinking without giv-  
us facts as to their authority and basis  
nformation and extent of research.  
Some allude to knowledge of Old  
tament Hebrew; word endings, vow-  
igns, etc., but I am unable to substan-  
e their interpretations which seem to  
be based on preconceived theories.

I have read the book, **God and the  
etoric of Sexuality**, by Phyllis Tribble.  
Understand and agree that women  
ve a very definite place and should be

recognized for their gifts and rights with-  
in the church today.

Perhaps you could address this ques-  
tion at some time in the future.

Lois H. Steensen  
New Concord, OH

If I were desirous of emigrating to the  
United States and did not wish to wait  
out the long quota system for legal im-  
migration, I should most certainly iden-  
tify myself as being the victim of perse-  
cution and possible violence and apply  
for sanctuary, even if my actual reasons  
were socioeconomic. Wouldn't you?

Ms. Berneking's article, full of poig-  
nancy, pathos, and pandering to guilt is  
nevertheless a call to churches to partic-  
ipate in an illegal act. Is this what we  
can expect of our "new" church?

Helen Block  
Cameron, WI

I just finished reading your first "Self-  
care" column, and while it's true that we  
need to take responsibility in caring for  
our health, your conclusion is wrong:  
Who is in charge? Or perhaps more ap-  
propriately: Who is in control?

The correct answer is "God is," not  
"You are." Do you decide if you are  
going to get an ovarian cyst or even ap-  
pendicitis? What can you do to prevent  
either affliction or hundreds of other  
medical problems for which no cause is  
known? We need to stop presenting the  
idea that man is in control of his life and  
health, and give God his rightful place  
back again.

Carolyn Copeland  
Phoenix, AZ

■ Address communications to: Letters,  
Lutheran Woman Today, 8765 W.  
Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631.

Mary Ylvisaker Nilsen

Mary Ylvisaker Nilsen

All were women who had been with Jesus since the beginning of his ministry. They had listened to him and learned from him, they had stayed with him through his death when all other disciples fled, they were given the commission to go and tell that Jesus is risen, they

I could have written a verse that mentioned Mary and Martha or one that listed the names of Lydia, Prisca, Julia, Mary, Junia, Phoebe, Euodia and others, all leaders who were converted to the new faith and who committed their lives to discipleship. But I didn't. And our children and I are the poorer for it, for we all, at some level, thought of disciples as men.

The purpose statement of the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America states that we "... called to discipleship in Jesus Christ." By definition, a disciple is one who learns from a master, ascribes to



# community

things, and works to spread them to others. The gospel writers have given us dramatic models of women engaged in each of these activities. We treasure, for instance, the story of Mary sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to him, learning from him, and being told she was doing a right thing (Luke 10:38-42). Or the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, attentive to Jesus as he shares with her some of his most profound truths, believing him, then spreading the news to others in her town (John 4:1-30).

All the gospel writers mention that it was the women who stayed with Jesus during his crucifixion, to whom he first appeared after his resurrection, and to whom he gave the task of spreading the wonderful news. Indeed, there is nothing in all the recorded life and teaching of Christ that implies that he thought of women who followed him as less than disciples, as less than persons with a calling and a ministry.

And Jesus is still calling us one by one—to follow and to learn, to teach and to preach, to minister to and suffer with, to serve and support, to love.

We are called to be disciples of Jesus, Immanuel. Let us look at four words that can help us define what it means to be a disciple of Immanuel, God with us. These words all begin with the prefix *com* meaning "with" or "together." The first of these appears in the opening phrase of the Women of the ELCA purpose statement, "As a community of women . . ."

Community. We are a community of women. We think of the word *community* as meaning a group, or perhaps even "people in unity." But the root of the word means "duty," and the whole word actually means "duty with" or "duty together." We are women who, together, have accepted a duty, a task, a purpose, something to live for, something to give ourselves to. Our discipleship has something to do with duty, with the common good. And the sign that we have true community is not how much we get done, but the gratitude with which we view the task, the joy with which we do it, and the appreciation we have for those working with us, even when we don't always agree with them.

# compassion

# comfort

Compassion. The second word that helps us define disciple is *compassion*. Wherever Christians bond in community, compassion happens. In the gospel of Luke (6:36), Jesus concludes his sermon on how to live as his disciples with the words, "be compassionate" (or "merciful" in some translations). The word *passion* means "to suffer," and so to be compassionate is to "suffer with," to go where people are hurting and walk with them.

Just as the sign of true community is joy, so the sign of true compassion is patience. In fact, the words *passion* and *patience* have the same root—"to suffer." Patience springs from the realization that the world is in much larger hands than our own, that all we can do is all we can do and that God expects no more, for God is at work all over the globe bringing about connections between persons and between persons and events. Connections that, in fact, give us a glimpse of the kingdom.

Patience saves us from the twin pitfalls of hopeless despair and angry fighting. It allows us to live and work one

day at a time, especially when the outcome of our work is hard to envision. It enables us to love and respect those with whom and for whom we work, because we know it is not our task to change them or "fix" them. It is only our task to love them and suffer with them.

Comfort. In Philippians 2:1 (Today's English Version) we read, "Your life in Christ makes you strong, and his love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit, and you have kindness and compassion for one another." The third *com* word shows us that being a disciple is *comfort* or "strength with."

The compassionate, Christian community is like a fort. That community provides strength and protects us. It also gives us a safe place to be accepted and to accept, to succeed and fail, to comfort and be comforted. Here we are able to learn and grow, to experiment with ideas, and to express doubts.

The opposite of comfort is another *com* word: *competition*, to contend with, or vie for. Competition sets disciple against disciple, each seeking to be better than the other and to set the sta-

# commitment



As women of the church, Jesus calls us one by one to be disciples. And that discipleship has to do with community, compassion, comfort and commitment.

al by which both are judged. Community has no place in discipleship. It destroys community and suffocates compassion.

commitment. The final *com* word helps us define how we can live our discipleship is commitment, which comes from the root "to send out with."

not difficult to see how the word "commitment" came to mean dedication or making a pledge. Think how impossible it is to produce the kind of energy necessary to move out of our safe zone with a message unless we deeply believe that message and are dedicated to the cause. One must precede the other or the message will not ring true.

As women of the church, Jesus calls us one by one to be disciples. And that discipleship has something to do with community, compassion, comfort and commitment. We believe in and follow a God who loves us, who teaches us, who lives with us and suffers with us, and who gives us strength. As we grow in discipleship, we too can love, and live with, and suffer with, and provide strength for, a world desperately in need.



# DISCIPLESHIP

What do you suppose Jesus meant when he said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . "?

Was his intention that we "make disciples" the same way that we make cookies? Start with an unbeliever. Then add all the right ingredients: sift in a cup of Bible study, cut in three tablespoons of fellowship, add two beaten commitment meetings, a dash of witnessing, bake for a few months, and you will have one disciple.

Or did Jesus have in mind "making disciples" as being more like making friends—meeting someone you would like to get to know, respecting that person as an equal, opening yourself to that person, loving, caring for, being cared for?

The difference is between the way Jesus set about making disciples—slowly, one at a time, personally meeting needs, loving—and the way some Christians have tried to make disciples: through power, as in military conquest, or even in the power of one person over another. One person determined to force upon another what he or she has in order to meet the other person's perceived needs, obstinately trying to turn

the other into some preconceived image of what a Christian ought to be.

There has been a certain arrogance in the ways that Christians sometimes go about proclaiming the gospel, an arrogance that can be easy to fall into if our lives have been touched by Christ. For it is natural to want others to see life as we see it, to know God as we know God.

To help avoid such a trap, it might be well to remember that no one "knows" God. We know something about our experience of God. But God is so much more and God's ways so diverse that we can never begin to know or understand the ways in which God is working our lives, let alone in the lives of others.

We live with the paradox of being told to "make disciples" while at the same time realizing that only God can "make" a disciple, only God can turn life around, transform a heart.

Attempting to respond to Christ's command to "make disciples," involves concentrating on making better disciples of ourselves and then trusting God to use our lives, and our story, in whatever way God chooses to spread the gospel to those around us.—MYN





## FORUM

MARGARET E. HERZ-LANE

# HERE'S TO YOU, MRS. ROBINSON

g before Matthew, Mark, Luke, or  
I were known to me as followers of  
st, I became acquainted with a dis-  
e named Mrs. Robinson.

ne entered my life in a battered gray  
vy station wagon, wearing an over-  
d floppy hat and talking with the ut-  
t enthusiasm. That afternoon my  
ids and I had been playing a fast  
ie of double Dutch rope when she  
roached us.

"Your mother home?" she asked. A  
tive nod and I was off to find her. At  
time my family was what could best  
described as semi-churched. That is,  
parents belonged to a very large  
gregation quite a distance from our  
ne. This necessitated having a car to  
nd services. But since my mother  
not drive and my father, a railroad  
ker, was frequently away on Sun-  
s, we were not in church on a reg-  
basis. However, the conversation  
ch followed between my mother  
Mrs. Robinson resulted in my be-  
ning Sunday church school the very  
e Sunday.

y memory of Mrs. Robinson is no  
ger distinct, this incident having hap-  
ed some 30 years ago when I was  
seven or eight. What is still clear to  
however, besides the hat and the  
car, is Mrs. Robinson's love for her  
d and her concern for reaching out  
others, especially to children. By the  
y that she talked to me that day I

sensed that she was someone who  
cared about me.

*The Mrs. Robinsons are not  
"pros" at religion. They are  
regular working folks:  
gardeners, CPAs,  
homemakers or bank tellers.*

Many of us have known a disciple  
like Mrs. Robinson. She is the 25-year  
Sunday church school veteran, he is the  
parent with his kids and everyone else's  
in tow, they are the grandparents or the  
next-door neighbors.

Much like those early disciples, the  
Mrs. Robinsons are not "pros" at reli-  
gion. They are regular working folks:  
gardeners, CPAs, homemakers or bank  
tellers not unlike the fishermen and tax  
collectors of the past. In their own way  
they share the love they have received  
from God, and because of their sharing,  
lives are changed.

So here's to you, Mrs. Robinson. Here  
is to all those other disciples. Jesus loves  
you; thanks for letting us know he loves  
us, too.

*The Rev. Margaret E. Herz-Lane is a  
pastor at Camden Lutheran Parish,  
Camden, NJ.*

SEASON'S BEST



*Madre*



ry, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. What story lies behind this striking  
 ture of mother and children, especially as contemplated at Passion Sunday?  
**Heran Woman Today** asked two viewers to share the story they see behind the  
 Sara Calderón's meditation appears also in Spanish, her first language. What  
 y do you see in this print by a Puerto Rican artist? Your story, or these, used  
 h the art, might serve as a basis for a group devotion.—ED.

## A Passion Sunday Meditation

Why do I keep looking at the older child  
 in this picture? Perhaps it is the haunting  
 expression I find there. It is quite differ-  
 ent from the glow the mother showers  
 on the baby and quite different also  
 from the baby's feeling of relaxed well-  
 being in the mother's arms.

The older child seems focused on  
 something unseen to us and appears to

be shielding be-  
 hind mother's hip. I  
 imagine a tiny hand  
 clinging to mother's  
 ample skirt for secu-  
 rity. What is it the  
 older child sees?

What is it any-  
 way the older child  
 sees in those  
 eyes looking beyond  
 mother and mother  
 and mother into a  
 world largely un-  
 known and threaten-  
 ing? What is it that  
 moves us away

from that protecting hip and ample skirt  
 and into the world?

I suspect that it has to do with the un-  
 known clinging. Mother herself flows  
 through her skirt to her child. Even as  
 she attends directly to her baby, she  
 ties herself also to her older one. Do  
 children not grow best when there is some-  
 thing or someone to return to for safety  
 and refueling of the self? It is the lifelong  
 cycle—this progressing and regressing  
 and progressing again—something to  
 be acknowledged, encouraged, and  
 cherished in ourselves and those we  
 love.

Recently I saw a line attributed to  
 John W. Whitehead. It said, "Children  
 are the living messages sent to a time we  
 will not see." A message is being formed  
 behind that mother's hip. And mother  
 herself is both message and messenger.

But what if something goes wrong?  
 What if mother herself has nothing left  
 to give? What if poverty or abuse or

repression or even  
 her chosen life-style  
 leaves her adrift on a  
 sea of personal emp-  
 tiness? What, then,  
 flows through the  
 ample skirt except,  
 perhaps, her own  
 need? What message  
 is the world to re-  
 ceive?

I do hope the  
 mother takes care of  
 herself. I hope she  
 has someone who

loves her and refuels her. I hope she  
 knows her God through whose ample  
 skirt flows life itself. For mother remains  
 always a child, too, a message from her  
 God.



Thomas E. Kadel

# A Passion Sunday Meditation

Some years ago, a poor black Puerto Rican woman, like the one in this Puerto Rican print, lived on a small piece of land close to the sea in Puerto Rico. Her home, made out of old wood and a zinc roof corroded by the saltpeter, sheltered all she possessed: her husband and children. At the margins of the waters and society, she lived and worked hard to nurture and protect her loved ones.

One day a man bought that land and decided to develop it as a tourist's resort area. The woman was asked to leave. Not knowing where to go, she decided to stay.

Another day the police came, with weapons and a bulldozer, to throw her out and destroy her home.

Desperately, at the sight of such a danger, she took an old rusty weapon and left the house to protect her family. The police shot her to death in front of her husband and children, blowing up with the bullets one of her breasts and the skin of one arm. She never got to shoot her weapon because it didn't work at all.

Some people approved the crime, arguing that the law must prevail, even above human life itself. Some others, like myself, saw in that crime not only the absurdity of the act itself, but also the devaluing of human life and society's injustice and cruelty against the poor ones, especially women and children.

In some ways this true story reminds me of the Passion of Christ. How often

was he the cause of scandal because he identified himself with the helpless ones, like the Puerto Rican woman. In this passage with a beautiful image of Christ that reflects the feminine, Jesus responded to the Pharisees' obsession to defend the law above all: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those

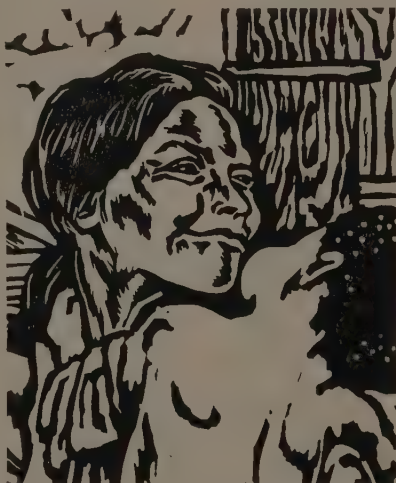
who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matthew 23:37)

How often Jesus jeopardized his life to make love prevail above all. How often he, like the woman, nurtured and protected the helpless ones and was called un-

lawful. He was also tortured, wounded and crucified. "He died under Pontius Pilate," says the Apostles' Creed. He died giving his life out of love.

As the prophet Isaiah says about God: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15).

And we thank God, for God did not forget us.



Sara E. Calder

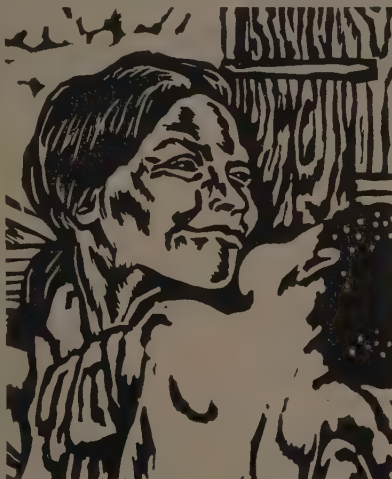


# Meditación para el domingo de la Pasión

De varios años una pobre mujer neopuertorriqueña, como la de este arte neopuertorriqueño, vivía en un terrenito al borde del mar en Puerto Rico. Su casa, hecha de madera vieja y un techo de zinc corroído por el salitre, albergaba a ella y a lo que ella podía: su esposo e hijos. A la orilla de las aguas y la sociedad, ella vivía y trabajaba duramente para alimentar y proteger a sus seres queridos. Un día, un hombre compró aquel terreno y decidió explotarlo como un atractivo turístico. El le dijo que se fuera, sabiendo a dónde ir, ella decidió darse.

Otro día vino la policía, con armas y una planadora, para sacarla de allí y destruir su casa. Desesperadamente, al ver tal peligro, la mujer tomó una arma vieja y mohosa escondida en la casa para proteger a su familia. La policía le disparó matándola, junto a su esposo y hijos, y volándole las balas un seno y la piel de un brazo. Ella nunca llegó a disparar con ella porque el arma no funcionaba. Algunas personas aprobaron este crimen argumentando que la ley siempre debe prevalecer, aún sobre la misma vida humana. Otros vimos en este crimen no sólo lo absurdo del acto mismo, sino también la desvalorización de la vida humana y la injusticia y crueldad de la sociedad contra los pobres, especialmente las mujeres y los niños.

De varias maneras esta historia realmente recuerda la Pasión de Cristo. Cuántas veces fue él la causa de escándalo porque se identificó con los desamparados, como esa mujer neopuertorriqueña. En un pasaje con una hermosa imagen



femenina de Dios, Jesús le responde a la obsesión de los fariseos por defender la ley ante todo: "¡Jerusalém, Jerusalém! Tú matas a los profetas y apedreas a los que Dios te envía. ¡Cuántas veces quise juntar a tus hijos, como la gallina recoge a sus pollitos bajo sus alas, y tú no lo has querido!" (Mateo 23:37 BL).

Cuántas veces Jesús puso en peligro su vida para hacer que el amor prevaleciera. Cuántas veces él, como esa mujer, alimentó y protegió a los desamparados, y fue llamado quebrantador de la ley. El también fue torturado, herido, y crucificado. "Murió bajo Poncio Pilatos," dice el Credo Apostólico. El murió dando su vida por amor.

Como dice el profeta Isaías acerca de Dios: "Pero, ¿puede una mujer olvidarse del niño que cría que no tenga compasión en el hijo de sus entrañas? Aun estas pueden olvidar, pero yo nunca me olvidaré de ti!" (Isaías 49:15 BL).

Y gracias le damos a Dios, porque El no se olvidó de nosotros.

Sara E. Calderón

# REFLECTIONS ON A COMMUTER MARRIAGE

*As Told to Lutheran Woman Today*



**H**ow do you think your weekly commuting has affected our marriage?" It was Thelda who asked the question. She and husband Bob were in the car at the time, she at the wheel and he in the copilot's seat. They were on a weekend getaway to the hills of southern Missouri to enjoy the autumn colors—and each other.

"How do you think your weekly commuting has affected our marriage?" she asked again. Long pause while the scenery rolled by. Then he laughed. "If I'd say that the commuting has been good for our marriage, you'd probably correct me, if only to keep me humble."

Her turn to laugh. "But," he continued, "I'm going to say so anyway."

"Of course," Thelda reminded him. "Our marriage was strong to begin with."

"Of course," Bob agreed. Laughter from both sides.

This is the fifth year that the Bertrams are, as they say, in "the commuting mode." They live in St. Louis, where Thelda is a full-time professional, a librarian at Washington University. She is also a lay assisting minister in their local congregation, Luther Memorial. For several years a member of the national board of directors of Lutheran Women.

us, she has been active also in logroups promoting and studying men's issues in the church.

Bob, a longtime professor of theology at St. Louis, joined his Seminary colleagues in their move to Luther School of Theology at Chicago in 1983. More exactly, he reenacts the move every week as a commuter. On Monday mornings back in St. Louis he teaches a course called Crossings, a program in theological education for lay people.

Originally Thelda and Bob considered moving to Chicago. (Now and then they still do.) But even then they would still be commuting back to St. Louis—Bob for his Saturday Crossings course, both of them for commitments they still have in that community. So, in 1983, they decided to give the St. Louis-based commuting a one-year trial: live apart on weekdays, come together for long weekends. Five years later the arrangement is still going strong.

The conversation in the car resumes. Thelda: "Remember when we first told the kids about our plan? They were afraid we would grow apart."

Bob: "I think they thought we were going dangerously."

Thelda admits she and Bob have an advantage that many commuter marriages don't. Their children, six of them, are all grown and have gone off to make homes of their own. "We couldn't do this as easily if at home there were kids who needed both parents."

Thelda thinks that the two of them actually "see" more of each other now than they used to. "It isn't enough just to live in the same town, or even under the same roof. You still may not come together."

Now we work at it more,"

Bob. "We've been on more dates in the past five years than in the previous

10." On their respective calendars they already have nights out scheduled well into the summer of 1989.

"It isn't always roses," Thelda says. Every Sunday evening a little grief process sets in as they think about having to separate the next morning. Bob calls himself an "itinerant rabbi." They both think of themselves as "part-time celibates." Still, while apart Monday through Thursday, they work hard in their professions and devote long hours to their respective communities. Then, as Thursday approaches, the suspense mounts. "Homecoming is like a weekly honeymoon." Even Friday evening's eating-out-plus-grocery-shopping has become a special event. Saturday evenings they eat at home and call it "dinner." "In the dining room yet," Thelda winks. "By candlelight."

Naturally there is more long-distance phoning than before. And more laughs. One day in Bob's Chicago office, just as he was tightening his tie to stride into an early morning class, his phone rang. As he tells it, "There was this sweet female voice, in sort of a sultry whisper, saying just two words, 'Go, Cards.'"

Thelda, a jokester, was phoning from St. Louis, probably hoping to discombobulate her husband's classroom dignity. The St. Louis Cardinals baseball team had just won the National League playoff the night before and Thelda wanted to warn Bob not to eat din-







ner before returning to St. Louis that evening, since she was planning to take him out for a home-team celebration.

**N**ow that baseball season is over, she and Bob have moved on to other sports. During the winter they have been drowning their off-season sorrows by swimming laps at the nearby Washington University fieldhouse.

Short trips together sometimes combine pleasure with business. For example, last June they both had assignments in Kansas City at the Constituting Convention of their new Missouri-Kansas Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Thelda was a delegate from Luther Memorial, Bob a representative of his seminary. She admits that she voted for him for bishop but that she was also relieved when he—one of the four finalists—used his speech to withdraw in good humor.

Back in October, on their weekend drive through southern Missouri, Thelda and Bob stopped off in a quaint little rural community along the Mississippi River. It was the site where, over a century ago, their Saxon Lutheran forebears had settled in this country, exiles from religious oppression in Germany. Thelda and Bob have known something about religious conflict firsthand. And something about exile. (*Seminex* is shorthand for "Seminary in Exile.") As they chatted with farm people at Oktoberfest, where sausage and apple butter were being made on the spot, the Bertrams got to thinking.

On the drive back to St. Louis that afternoon, they mused about how their life-style contrasts with the settled, earthbound ways of their ancestors. Yet they also knew that the experience of exile, which they likewise shared with these ancestors, had taught them to travel light. "Home," as they say, "is not in a place. It's a kind of time—together."



# SPIRIT, THOU SHALT NOT BECOME OLD

THE  
ELEVENTH  
COMMANDMENT

NA HONG



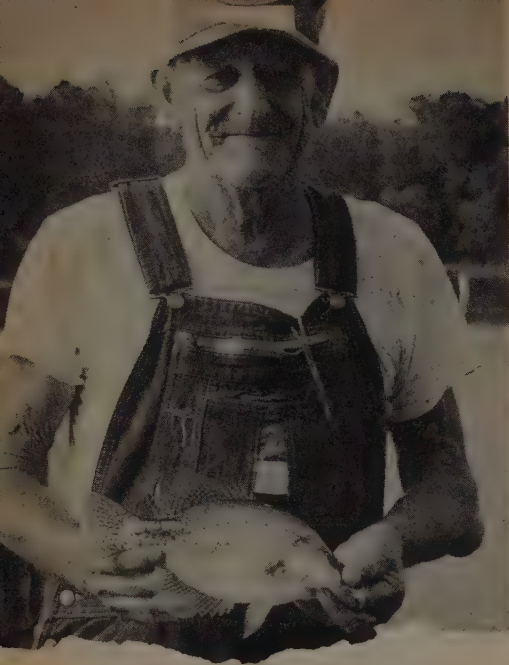
**T**he Ten Commandments are ten rules divinely given to chart the course of relationships of individuals to God and to each other. Were obeyed perfectly, there would be no idolism, racism, sectarianism, facism, sexism, handicappism, alcoholism, or any of the other isms the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve have brewed up over the centuries—including the comparatively recent brew, age-

The eleventh commandment (which, of course, claims no divine origin and therefore is not capitalized!) addresses itself to this last ism, the one that makes growing old in a youth-oriented society as painful as being black or Native American in a white-dominated society, or disabled in a society that idolizes physical perfection. Or a woman in a male-dominated society, or a man in a female-dominated family. In truth, the

eleventh commandment addresses itself, in particular, to the victims of this painful segregation, more than to the segregationists, for the victims of ageism are partly responsible for their own situation. Too often they meekly accept either a social apartheid, where they are relegated to the category of the helplessly “unusable aged,” or a physical apartheid, where they are placed in homes for the elderly. There to die of boredom because Sunday is just as tedious, uninteresting and spiritless as the other six days of the weary week.

The eleventh commandment addresses itself to human spirits and says: Spirit, thou shalt not become old; thou shalt be daily newborn in the Holy Energizing Spirit.

It would be futile for the eleventh commandment to say, “Body, thou shalt not become old,” for the body is destined to age, from birth to death. Yoga, yogurt, and jogging cannot make the body immortal. The mind, too, cannot of itself forestall affliction. Even the best



cared-for mind cannot remain perennially sharp. Only the human spirit can pray, as did Emily Dickinson in her poem "November": "Grant me, O Lord, a sunny mind Thy windy will to bear!"

After menopause, women's bodies are incapable of giving birth. But the Holy Creative Spirit has the power to make the human spirit capable of rebirth at any age. In old age the body may be sentenced to bed or a wheelchair for the rest of its days. But the human spirit can still run, jump, dance, and turn handsprings. Old age wrinkles the body. But, thanks be to God, the spirit in the crinkled body never needs ironing.

Now this may all sound like beautified, poetized piety on the page. But I know it to be true, for I have seen it with my own eyes. I have seen people with bodies so severely afflicted with the degenerative diseases of old age that one could legitimately expect vinegar to be flowing in the veins of their spirit.

Yet, despite all their physical impairments, many older people are remarkably young and buoyant in spirit. If one pays such a person a compassionate visit, one is exuberantly repaid with vision—and a victorious vision at that.

How can this be? Can a person who is physically degenerating climb the heights of the Spirit? God alone knows the whys and wherefores. Why some people reject, and why some people accept, the gifts of God's grace. But here are a few reasons that the Spirit helped me to see.

For one, victors over ageism have experienced the eternal breaking of time, and it has radically changed time for them. Or as that most remarkable woman, St. Theresa of Avila (1515-1582), once said: "All the way to heaven is heaven."

The past is changed. It is often so that old age either forgets the past, remembers the guilt and grudges of the past. In truth Christ redeems and gives the past and frees the mind of the spirit from negative retrospection.

Thanks be to God,  
the spirit in the  
crinkled body never  
needs ironing.

The present is changed. Old age often resents the losses that the present brings. Yet the Holy Spirit renews within us a right spirit that can rejoice in the present.

The future is changed. Old age fears the future. But the Holy Spirit comes and creates within the human spirit a sense of expectation and hope—a sense of future until the very end—after the end! Life past, present, or future is not a marching toward death but a marching toward heaven.



people who are victors over ageism be said to be living a "postmortem" that life after the dying-to-self that I so frequently recommends in his titles. Such persons have died to their I-seeking, I-want, me-first natures. As they do not make selfish claims on their relatives, or complain about being neglected by them. They have died to the natural passions and appetites that are so aptly summed up in the seven deadly sins of avarice, pride, lust, gluttony, sloth, envy. Indeed, they are relieved and grateful that the sometimes violent and painful fevers aroused by the "seven deadlies" have at least diminished, if not vanished. They have "died" to the functions that once made them feel important and useful. No longer are they "wife machines," "mother machines," "profession machines." They have died to perfectionism, to the need to impress others. They humbly accept a life with

no external successes; instead they know the internal successes of which they never had time even to dream. They watch themselves become nothing—and then, when they offer this nothingness to God, they discover, to their surprise, that this nothingness is not defeat but victory—victory over old age and ageism.

Pared and pruned, they are able—perhaps for the first time—to taste the whole wheat of spirit.

To obey the eleventh commandment and die to self clears the stage for spirit. The body and the mind can no longer dance as once they did. Now it is the spirit's turn to dance. And dance it does! In the new freedom and spontaneity that is the gift of a creative God, the spirit literally dances through old age and through death itself—to its new address!



# The Largess of God

Bible Basis: Mark 4

Study Texts: Mark 4:1-9; 26-29, 30-32

Selected Texts: Mark 4:10-20, 35-41

■ When she was a young girl, living in the city, Maria's father would do the grocery shopping. He'd walk down 86th Street to the Key Food Store, a tall Norwegian among the Italians of the neighborhood. When he returned home, his arms full of heavy brown grocery bags, he would unpack hamburger and chicken and cans of soup and white bakery bread. And then he might look boyish as he reached into the bag and pulled out a handful of fat black avocados and say that they were five for 49 cents. And Maria could hardly believe that it could be true, they were so cheap. But he'd be right. They would eat the avocados that day or the next, because they were so ripe. When they had peeled and eaten the green fruit, Maria's father would take each avocado seed, stick three toothpicks around its middle, and balance it over a glass filled with water. Soon there were five glasses, each with an avocado seed sticking out, lined on top of the refrigerator.

■ In the next weeks, the avocado seeds would dry up. Their skins would crack

and peel. The water under them would turn smelly and brown. Maria's mother would say that too many kitchen glasses were being used for avocado seeds.

■ Eventually, Maria's father would stare by the refrigerator and announce that one of the seeds was starting a root. Soon several of the avocado seeds would have roots curling down into the glasses of water under them. Then his father would plant each seed in a pot and put it on the floor in his study. As an avocado tree would grow, a tall stem with large, dark, green leaves layered up along it. The study was small, and it was like a jungle in there with all the avocado trees. But he said he felt like

he was back in Madagascar where he grew up as a missionary child, sitting under the trees that had grown from dried-up seeds.

■ This is one young girl's memory of a time when something small and insignificant

produced, in a hidden way, a great thing. What memory do you have of such a time in your life? Recall a time when, in a miraculous, unseen way, something small became something great in your life. Share your stories with one another.

ARISE  
TO  
LIFE!

*Largess (Larr-JESS) means "great generosity; the generous gifts given."*

Read Mark 4:1-41 or Mark 4:1-9, 26-30-32.

## The Parables of Jesus

Our English word parable comes from the Greek word *parabole* (PA-ra-bo-lay), which means "to throw or put beside." A parable is a "comparison" that sets two or more things beside one another in order to tell a story and teach a lesson. There are many parables outside the Bible, especially in Jewish rabbinic literature. They are not unique to Jesus or to the New Testament. But in Mark and the other gospels, Jesus tells many parables: in our study text alone, Jesus tells four, and Mark refers to many others told but not written down (4:33). In this study, we will examine the parables of Jesus and learn more about these comparisons he liked to put together and tell.

Most often, a parable is a comparison between an unknown thing and a known thing. In his parables, Jesus takes something his hearers are struggling to understand—an unfamiliar, abstract concept—and compares it to some familiar, concrete, tangible thing in their lives. He does this, hoping that the known thing will help his hearers understand an unknown thing he is explaining to them.

A parable often uses the word "like" or "as." It is a form of what English teachers call a "simile." "My love is like a red, red rose" is one famous simile. This simile compares an abstract, unknown thing—"my love"—to a concrete, familiar thing—"a red, red rose." This comparison makes abstract love a sensual, beautiful thing.

Parables work in a similar way. In Mark 4:30, Jesus is trying to explain the kingdom of God. It is an abstract, unknown thing to his hearers. And he asks, "With what can we compare the king-

dom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?" He decides that the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed that is planted and grows. Jesus' comparison makes the kingdom of God a thing his hearers can experience and know because they have planted tiny mustard seeds and watched them grow.

■ To teach about an abstract thing like the kingdom of God, he tells the parable of a mustard seed, or he tells a parable about yeast used by a woman to bake bread (Luke 13:20-21). To teach forgiveness, Jesus tells a parable about an unforgiving servant whose master forgave him a million-dollar debt, while the servant, in turn, refused to forgive a debt of a few dollars owed him by another servant (Matthew 18:23-35). To teach neighborliness and correct obedience to the law, Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). To teach about prayer, Jesus relates a parable about an ornery judge and a persistent woman (Luke 18:1-8).

■ Another thing to note about the parables of Jesus is that, while many of them appear in more than one gospel, they differ from gospel to gospel. Luke will use different details than Matthew. Or Matthew will put a certain parable in a different setting than Luke. For example, the parable of the lost sheep appears in both Matthew and Luke.

**1** Read Luke 15:1-7. What is the setting of the parable? What is the parable about?



**2** Read Matthew 18:10-4. What is the setting? What is the parable about?

■ The parable is essentially the same in both Matthew and Luke. But notice the difference the setting makes. Luke's setting makes this parable a lesson about God's love for lost sinners. Matthew's changes it into instruction about how to care for other believers.

■ Most people love a story. Parables are Jesus' stories to us: stories with characters, images, and events that can teach us about God's kingdom and the Messiah whom God sent.

### Mark's Three Seed Parables

Read the following parables and respond to the questions for each.

**1** Mark 4:1-9. What is the setting of this parable? Who is the main character of this parable? What does this character do? What is the result?

**2** Mark 4:26-29. What is the setting for this parable? Who are the main characters? What do they do? What is the result?

**3** Mark 4:30-32. What is the setting of this parable? Who is the main character? What does this character do? What's the result?

**4** What do these parables teach the crowds and us about the kingdom of God?

**5** What do they teach about our role in the kingdom of God?

■ Another setting for these parables is their place in the book of Mark. Recall Mark 2-3 and the criticisms of Jesus at his ministry that we encountered in these chapters just before the parables. Remember also the disbelief on the part of many that Jesus was the Messiah. With these parables, Jesus is not only teaching the crowds, but he is responding to such criticisms and disbelief. People were critical and disbelieving of Jesus because they awaited a Messiah who would come to conquer Israel's enemies and restore its people to greatness and power in the world. Instead, Jesus came and ate with sinners and tax collectors, and challenged their interpretation of the law. They wondered, "Could this be the Messiah?"

Jesus says in response that he is a sower-farmer. He says that the kingdom of God is like a seed that grows—even under conditions that seem hopeless, in places we can't even know—and yields a harvest.

What are the times when life situations have overwhelmed you and you wanted to give up hope?

When have you wanted Jesus to conquer? To conquer enemies in your life, or make our country great?

What do you learn from these parables about the ways Jesus the Messiah works?

What hope does this give you?

Most of Jesus' parables depend on the hearer to interpret them. Only a few are interpreted by the gospel writer. Mark

interprets the first of these seed parables, the parable of the sower.

■ Read Mark 4:10-20.

■ When we discussed this parable (page 24), we emphasized the contrast in it between seed time and harvest time. Mark's interpretation focuses instead on the soil. It says we are to be like good soil. Note that soil is passive material. It cannot make a seed grow. The promise in Mark's interpretation is that God is growing the seeds. Like the soil, we are to be patient and hopeful—trusting—for the harvest is coming.

### Insiders and Outsiders

Let's examine again the context in Mark of these parables. To do this, look first at their setting in Matthew 13, which contains some of the same seed parables.

**1** Read Matthew 13:13. What reason does Jesus give for telling parables?

**2** Read Mark 4:10-13. What reason does Jesus give for telling parables to outsiders? To insiders?

■ Jesus says he tells parables so that insiders—"those who were about him with the twelve" (Mark 4:10)—might perceive and understand. But he tells them also so that outsiders may not understand. In Mark, Jesus' parables are

more like riddles. Their purpose is not to reveal, but to obscure. There is mystery in the parables of Jesus in Mark.

■ How can we understand this? Mark is saying that to perceive and understand Jesus involves more than a rational or intellectual act. A person has to use more than her head. To perceive and understand Jesus, a person must have faith: faith to accept the mystery of the Messiah, faith to accept the mystery of God's ways of working in the world. God's ways are not what we expect.

■ But do the insiders even get it? Jesus has just "explained everything" to the disciples (4:34). Read Mark 4:35-41.

**3** What is the disciples' response? What does it indicate?

■ The disciples are a word of grace to us. Like them, we see and hear—yet fail to perceive and understand. But even as we struggle with the mystery of Jesus, he says, "Peace. Be still." And there can be calm for us.

### In Closing

Return to the opening discussion of memories. What have you learned about God's role and relationship to you through small events that have great significance?

### Worship

Prayer of the Day: Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

■ O God our defender, storms raised about us and cause us to be afraid. Rescue your people from despair, deliver your sons and daughters from fear, and preserve us all from unbelief; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen (LBW, page 25).

### Looking Ahead

To prepare for the next study, "Daughters Arise," read Mark 5. As you read, reflect on how God is working in your life to heal.

### Audiotapes readied for women's 1988 Bible study

Audiocassettes on the gospel of Mark—the focus of a 1988 Women of the ELCA Bible study, are available through the ELCA Publishing House. The tapes will help Bible study leaders in their preparation.

Six of the seven cassettes—available as a package (24-8860, \$29.95 plus postage and handling) or individually (at \$6.95 per tape) feature two ELCA pastors: the Rev. Kristine Carlson, Northfield, Minn., and the Rev. Carol Mork, Columbia Heights, Minn. They present a 12-part series of lectures on the gospel.

The seventh tape (24-8853, \$6.95 plus postage and handling) features Bonnie Jensen, an ELCA staff person, and Irene Getz, a former ALC staff member, who present "The History of Women and Bible Study" and "Leading Small Group Bible Study," respectively.

The tapes may be ordered by writing ELCA Publishing House, 426 Fifth St., Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440, or making a toll-free call: Minnesota, 1-800-752-8153; other states, 1-800-328-4648.



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## Another famine

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Ethiopia is facing another very critical famine situation," according to Ato Francis Stephanos, president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Stephanos noted that before the disaster has occurred, the time for churches to assist those in need. EECMY plans to assist about 10 million people. "We have the love, the know-how, and the experience to handle this," he said. "There is much we can do and we plan to distribute food and provide medical aid."

Lutheran World Information  
*Our brothers and sisters are hungry, Lord. Fill us with compassion so that they may be fed. Amen.*

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## Extending a call

---

Hundreds of congregations are in the midst of seeking a new pastor. Call committees share their hopes and dreams, interview candidates, and seek God's guidance. Sometimes a sense of commitment and direction grows slowly for a call committee. When it comes, according to Marcia Riggers of Wood, Washington, there is "a new excitement, a new vision, a sense of purpose." It is then, she says, that their committee knows it is "ready to extend a call."

*Guide those who serve on call committees, Lord. Grant them patience, wisdom and a sense of your presence. Amen.*

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## Can you read this?

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Twenty percent of Americans could not read this sentence. Thirty-three percent would have difficulty. Many of these people are Lutheran. Faith Fretheim, Director of Literacy for Women of the ELCA, says, "Lutherans must begin to think beyond the stereotype that Lutherans are well-educated, middle class, and literate. Many Lutherans—and their neighbors—are not."

*Lord, we pray for all men and women who struggle with words. Open our ears to hear their sighs and our eyes to see their pain. Amen.*

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## Little evangelists

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For students in Christian day schools, the Easter holidays are especially exciting. There are about 140 elementary and secondary schools and 1500 preschools connected with ELCA congregations. In these schools, approximately 25% of the students are unchurched. These students carry the good news of Jesus' resurrection home to their families.

*Lord, we thank you for all who carry your word to others. Bless the children who attend our Lutheran schools. Amen.*

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## Today's news

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Something is happening today where you live. Use your daily newspaper as a basis for prayer.

Myrna Sheie



# The Garden

*Seeds—those wonderful, seemingly insignificant producers of new life—come for comment in this month's Bible study (see page 22). Frog and Toad have something to teach about seeds, people and life in this short story for children and adults. Consider sharing—perhaps reading aloud—this story with a young in your life.—ED.*

Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row Publishers  
from *Frog and Toad Together* by Arnold Lobel. Copyright  
1971, 1972 by Arnold Lobel.

og was in his garden.  
ad came walking by.  
What a fine garden you have, Frog," he said.  
es," said Frog. "It is very nice,  
t it was hard work."  
wish I had a garden," said Toad.  
ere are some flower seeds.  
ant them in the ground," said Frog,  
nd soon you will have a garden."  
ow soon?" asked Toad.  
Quite soon," said Frog.  
ad ran home.  
e planted the flower seeds.  
ow seeds," said Toad, "start growing."  
ad walked up and down a few times.  
e seeds did not start to grow.  
ad put his head close to  
e ground and said loudly,  
ow seeds, start growing!"  
ad looked at the ground again.  
e seeds did not start to grow.  
ad put his head very close  
the ground and shouted,  
OW SEEDS, START GROWING!"  
og came running up the path.  
What is all this noise?" he asked.  
My seeds will not grow," said Toad.  
You are shouting too much," said Frog.  
These poor seeds are afraid to grow."



"My seeds are afraid to grow?" asked Toad.

"Of course," said Frog.

"Leave them alone for a few days.

Let the sun shine on them,

let the rain fall on them.

Soon your seeds will start to grow.

That night Toad looked out of his window.

"Drat!" said Toad.

"My seeds have not started to grow.

They must be afraid of the dark."

Toad went out  
to his garden  
with some candles.

"I will read the  
seeds a story,"  
said Toad.

"Then they will  
not be afraid."

Toad read a long  
story to his seeds.

All the next day  
Toad sang songs  
to his seeds.

And all the next  
day Toad read  
poems to his seeds.

And all the next day Toad played music  
for his seeds.

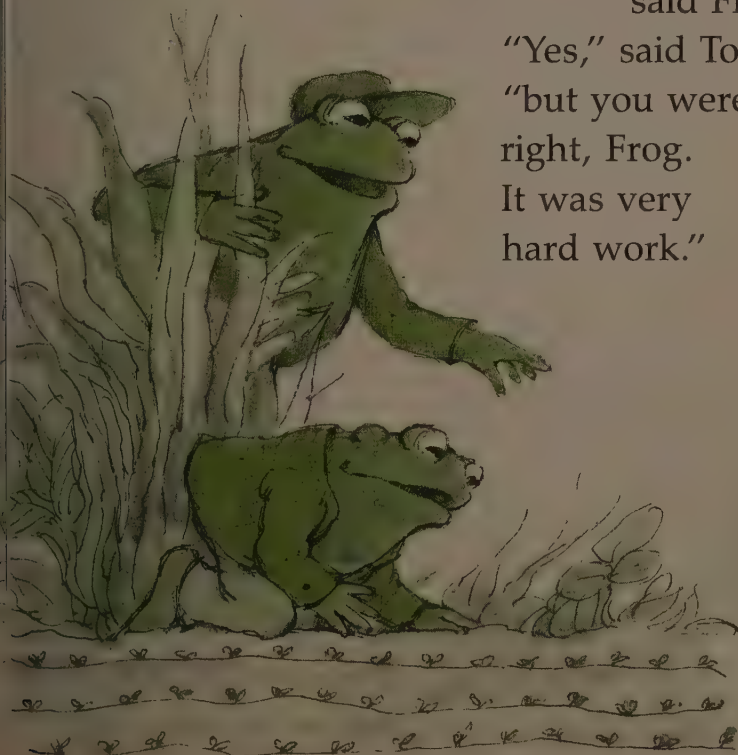
Toad looked at the ground.



e seeds still did not start to grow.  
“What shall I do?” cried Toad.  
“These must be the most frightened seeds  
in the whole world!”  
When Toad felt very tired, and he fell asleep.  
“Toad, Toad, wake up,” said Frog.  
“Look at your garden!”  
Toad looked at his garden.  
“Little green plants were coming up  
out of the ground.  
At last,” shouted Toad, “my seeds have stopped  
being afraid to grow!”  
“And now you will have a nice garden too,”

said Frog.

“Yes,” said Toad,  
“but you were  
right, Frog.  
It was very  
hard work.”





# SISTERS IN CHRIST: WOMEN OF THE SOVIET UNION

Eleanor Mathews

*This is the final report of a three-part series on women of Eastern Europe; previous issues of Lutheran Woman Today featured women of the German Democratic Republic and of Poland. The writer and the photographer, Edwina Davis Edwards, were participants in a study tour of Soviet bloc countries by Lutheran women in April 1987.*

Our pilgrimage took us to the Soviet Union at Easter, providing us the opportunity to observe and worship in four different churches.

Although religion is called "unnecessary" in Communist doctrine, and although some 70 percent of the population professes atheism, God is still alive in the Soviet Union, and religious fervor survives there. The Christian church, struggling under repression, continues, even though more and more churches are declared to be "nonfunctioning" by the state.

Quite closely shepherded, tourists are not able to come and go as freely as one

might wish. The language barrier prevents much contact with ordinary citizens. But eyes, hearts, hands, pictures and snapshot collections promote meaningful communication.

In the streets, sweeping with a broom of twigs, in the museums, keeping a watchful eye on visitors, in the classroom, guarding operagoers' wraps, there is the omnipresent anonymous older woman everyone calls "babushka," for the kerchief she always wears on her head.

Her presence is most keenly felt in the churches, for babushka forms the majority and the backbone of the Russian Orthodox congregation. Quietly, humbly, she moves about in the "functioning church," one whose duties have, with state permission, been allowed to remain open.

Carefully she takes the long, thin tapers passed up to her, lights them, places them on a brass candleholder before an icon in one of the many recesses of the sanctuary. As each candle flickers out, she removes it. Her red-stained





...it, an Intourist guide in Moscow.

...nails continually pick the dripped  
...from the floor. Devotedly, she  
...s and buffs the gilded icon frame,  
...ged from the many reverent kisses  
...d there.

...mong the thousand worshipers  
...who throng the cathedral for the  
...Easter Eve vigil, only a few may  
...unted among the truly faithful. Yet  
...any are drawn here by the special  
...y, the brilliant drama, the awe-  
...ness of the ritual which marks the  
...x-of the Christian year.

"Christos vos kresce!" the cry goes  
...Christ is risen!" I repeat in stum-  
...Russian to babushka, next to me.  
...Christos vos kresce!" she responds  
...a broad smile, and reaches into her  
...et. She brings forth a shiny, brown-  
...egg and extends it shyly. "Christ is  
..." The words make us instant sis-

...en the Intourist guides give the ba-  
...ska her due, saying, "Without her,  
...g families could not exist. The ba-  
...skas stand in the long shopping  
... They keep the crowded, shared  
...ements clean. They are the unpaid  
...sitters."

...d yet they receive their recom-  
...el! For it is the babushka, sometimes  
...e sly, sometimes with the parents'

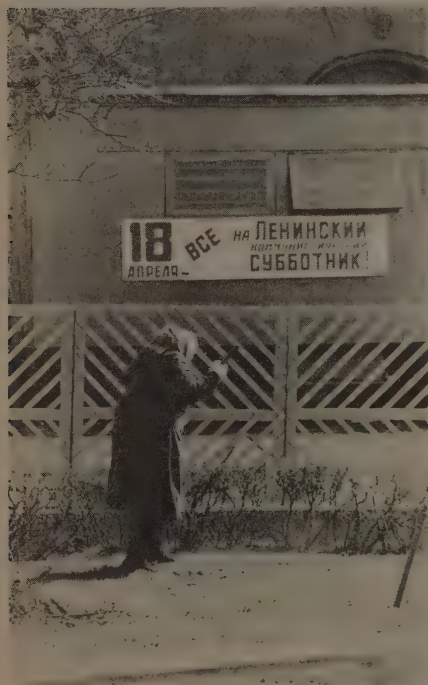
unspoken permission, who brings the child to the priest for Baptism. She brings the children with her to the divine service. She lifts the little boy up to kiss the icon, and smiles peacefully as, together, they make the sign of the cross. To her wide-eyed granddaughter she recounts the stories of the saints and martyrs depicted on the gilded iconostasis that shields the altar from the congregation's view.

Wise old woman! She knows the parable of the seeds: some will be trampled underfoot, some uprooted, but some will take root. "Harmless" and humble, the babushka nevertheless exerts a force to be reckoned with.

"Christos vos kresce!" Christ is risen! The words make us instant sisters.

Taissa (tie-ee-sa) is an English-speaking Intourist guide in Moscow. Unlike many women in the capital city, Taissa is modishly dressed: she wears a suede-like suit and leather boots. Her blonde hair, her skin and her nails show great attention and care. Her knowledge of the city and of the culture of her people is almost encyclopedic. Her pride in her nation and its achievements is deep and genuine, yet she listens tolerantly to the sometimes "loaded" questions, and answers them gently and unemotionally. She resists the sometimes defensive or authoritarian manner of some of her colleagues.

Like nine out of 10 women between the ages of 20 to 49, Taissa is employed full-time. She acknowledges that equality of opportunity has enabled women to enter many nontraditional fields, such as mining, engineering, commercial fishing, railroad building, and to dominate such occupations as health and medicine, economics, and education.



**“Harmless”  
and humble,  
the babushka  
nevertheless  
exerts a force  
to be reckoned  
with.**

But she admits that women have not risen to the uppermost levels in any of these endeavors. Without female participation, modernization in the early days of Soviet history could not have been accomplished; productivity to the end could not be fully attained.

Taissa's salary, like all salaries in the Soviet Union, is set by the state according to the perceived degree of usefulness of the occupation. Thus, miners receive a higher wage than doctors, and drivers outstrip teachers. But “money is not everything,” the guide says. “I take my job as an arena for sharing my thoughts and hopes. I give it my best effort and devotion,” she says.

**A**lthough rents are quite high, housing is still in short supply, and doubling up or even tripling is not uncommon.

Like most Russians, Taissa has a deep respect for the traditions and heritage of the forefathers, their strength and their dignity. While she “understands the message of religion, love for one's neighbor, sacrifice for someone else,” no way can she accept “religious dogmas.” In this regard Taissa is like the majority of her people, who do not openly profess Christ, and who, by law, may not be subjected to any kind of religious propaganda (education and evangelization). The six to seven percent of the population who are practicing members are absolutely forbidden to practice religion; many others avoid religious affiliation because they do not wish to jeopardize personal or professional advancement. Those who practice religion may do so only privately, or in the officially recognized registered churches. To do otherwise is punishable.

Yet, the ties between patriotism and national pride and the Russian Orthodox church are significant. So that her daughters may also remember their Russian roots, Taissa makes the tr



Children with their teacher in Tallinn.

kulichi (bread) at Easter, using the bread handed down by her foremothers. "Nonbelievers can still respect this tradition and heritage," she declares. "Of course she does not take the kulichi to church to have it blessed.)

However, "in the moral values; in the art that expresses the greatness of the human spirit that 'spirituality' requires. This spirituality does not depend on God; it does not need God," she says firmly. Such art can be seen in some of the Estonian cathedrals that have been converted into museums. Centuries-old, painstakingly restored and maintained, religious art is valued as a national treasure—divorced from worship.

Within the Kremlin walls, the Cathedral of the Assumption, one of several former worship places of the czars, is now the repository of a treasure of icons and sacred paintings used in Orthodox worship. Taissa is to interpret one of her favorite paintings: Christ sorrowing. "Look at the faces," she says in awed tones. "How they see into man's soul, how they feel!"

Eerik Raudsepp is one of only six Estonian Lutheran pastors in Estonia. Once

a predominantly Lutheran nation, Estonia must now abide by the same religious restrictions imposed on other Soviet republics. Currently the shepherd of a suburban congregation of under 200 members, Vivian was, until quite recently, the minister of the larger and more prestigious Toomkirche (cathedral) of Tallinn, seat of the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Estonia.

From Tallinn's old town walls, many church spires can be seen. But most of the buildings now serve as concert or exposition halls or as museums. In all Estonia there are only 142 active congregations, with only 100 clergy serving about 200,000 members. The edicts against reaching out to the unchurched, the prohibition of confirmation, the restrictions on youth ministry, and the laws forbidding social services (*diakonia*) cause understandable anxiety about the future of the church in Estonia.

And yet, Eerik Hiisjar, former acting bishop of Estonian Lutherans, says, "the Lutheran religion itself is a miracle without a miracle. It is not supported by human beings, but by the Holy Spirit. The strength of the church does not lie in the



total figures, but it exists wherever two or three are gathered."

Vivian's belief in the survival of the church in Estonia is equally strong. "But we cannot do the same things you do, and we must do things differently," she explains. For example, "Religious propaganda [the constitutionally prescribed phrase for religious education] is carried out in the family circle." Teenagers are no longer enrolled in catechetics classes. At age 18 they may choose to request private instruction from the pastor if they wish to be confirmed. It is not unusual for Baptism to come at 12, 15, 18 years of age. And although infant baptism has fallen, teenage Baptisms have increased.

In Estonia, as in other countries where atheism is the prevailing philosophy, church leaders, pastors, and congregations must learn to compromise, to walk a tightrope. But one of the issues that both church and state address with urgency is peace and nuclear disarmament. Vivian, along with another female pastor, Margit Virgi, was named to the Estonian (Women's) Peace

Committee, an arm of the Soviet Peace Committee.

What part do pastors play promoting peace? Vivian responds: "Our congregations make donations to the Soviet Peace Fund, which helps the needy and suffering worldwide and which finances the International Peace Congresses. We observe Peace Week. But, really, every service is a declaration of peace. We are all personally concerned that peace might rule all over the world, and it begins by loving one's neighbor, by keeping the fire of love burning in our hearts."

Frederike, Berit, Gisela, Margot, Gitte, Danuta, Marta, Barbara, Vivian, babushka: we are separated by language. We are separated by customs. We are separated by political ideologies. We are separated by oceans. But as women we are already sisters. It is Christ who brings us all together and makes one.

"Peace begins  
by loving one's  
neighbor, by  
keeping the  
fire of love  
burning in our  
hearts."

KRISTINE M. HOLMGREN

# NOTHING NEW ABOUT NEW AGE

claim to be gods. When they get together they do something from "healing massage" to spiritual counseling."

They use crystals for meditation and prayer. They believe in reincarnation, in the unity of all things.

They are the "New Age" theologians. Scholars contend that there is nothing new about them.

Since the earliest days of Christianity, certain deviant groups of believers have claimed that salvation comes from a source inside the individual," said Michael Juel, associate professor of New Testament at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. "They believe one need only find the 'special secret,' put forth that extra effort and it will be well.

However, the Gospel tells us that salvation does not depend on the efforts of the self. Salvation comes to us from a God who works in history; not from the inside but from the outside." New Age theology affirms the ability of the individual to find salvation through self-affirmation and nurture. The term "New Age" encompasses the practice of astrology, parapsychology and material mysticism.

Over 500 "New Age" believers united for a summer at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota for the 19th Annual Midwest Retreat for Spiritual Fron-

tiers Fellowship. Titled, "Ye Are Gods," some of the workshops offered were "Recognize God Within You and Become Whole," "I Love Myself the Way I Am," "Advanced Crystal Energy," and "How to Be Your Own Guru."

"We come together to share, to learn to experience and to gather tools for our daily living," said Judy Person of Owatonna, Minnesota, member of Psychical Research Society of Kansas City. "We have the challenge today to realize and accept our responsibility to heal our universe."

These are presumptions that rely on an inflated understanding of the self, according to Juel. "Thinking people who view history with a critical perspective cannot ignore that when we look deep within we often find things that are not pretty. "In fact," Juel continued, "many of the institutions of our society are structured in an effort to stop what is 'inside' from getting out."

However, New Age religion continues to grow.

"The poverty of this movement is in their blind spot," said Juel. "They cannot see that often real freedom is freedom from the self. It is a common deception throughout the history of the faith."

*The Rev. Kristine M. Holmgren is a freelance writer and pastor of Laurel Presbyterian Church, Hager City, WI.*

# BACKTALK

**A**s the woman struggled to lift the last bag of groceries from the trunk of her car, she placed her hand on her back, paused for a moment, and sighed. . . .

The strain of being a woman can sometimes be tremendous. Women often take on the role of being caregivers—not a bad role in and of itself. But all too often women do so at their own expense. They take care of children, spouse, parents, and friends long before they ever think of taking time to care for themselves or to listen to what their bodies might be telling them about their own needs.

At some time in our lives most of us will experience back pain. According to the American Medical Association, 80 percent of all North Americans suffer from back pain. Every day we make unreasonable demands on our backs as we slouch, twist, and bend our way through the day. When our back hurts, it's talking to us. Take time to listen to it carefully.

Backaches are second only to the common cold as the nation's leading cause of time lost from work. Experts estimate the treatment of such pain costs as much as \$18 million each year.

**W**ith so much at stake, it is essential to see why learning about and listening to—our backs—is so important. See how much of the following information on backs you know and remember.

Your backbone or spine has three natural curves. The cervical curve is the slight forward curve of the neck. The thoracic curve is the slight backward curve of the upper back. The lumbar curve is the slight forward curve of the lower back.

The best way to prevent back pain is to maintain proper weight, exercise regularly, and practice good posture. If you have good posture, you can maintain the three natural curves of your spine in comfortable alignment.

Your particular posture is due to a combination of heredity and habit. The most common posture problems among most of us are rounded or slumped shoulders and a "sway back." This problem exaggerates the normal curve of the spine, unnaturally stretching and weakening adjacent muscles and ligaments.

Poor posture starts as a seemingly comfortable habit, but it eventually hurts. It can result in a host of musculoskeletal syndromes: pinched nerves, strained muscles, inflamed ligaments, and ruptured discs. As we get older,



body weight and muscle weakness lead to back problems.

Medical doctors tell us that people who have poor posture often develop arthritis later in life. Repeated unbalanced stresses take their toll on the vertebrae.

There is good news, however. We can maintain our spine's three natural curves with good posture. We have more energy and less chance of backache, stiffness, or injury. Here is some straight talk about posture, advice that will do well to follow.

Stand with your head up. Pull in abdominal muscles tightly to support the lower back.

Stand with your lower back against a wall. Keep your head over your neck and your spine straight. Try not to sit for more than an hour at a time. Get up and move around at intervals.

**Proper lift** keeping the back straight, abdominal muscles tightened to support the lower back. Bend your knees, keep your back and neck in a straight line; bend over the hips and lift with your legs. A helpful tip is to keep your feet landing in mind. For example, when picking up something from the floor, plant the left foot, then right foot firmly, and hold on to a chair, table, or counter for support with the left hand. No front lifting! Don't bend over the waist. Weight lifted improperly causes a tenfold strain on the back. For instance, a 30-pound toddler lifted improperly puts a 300-pound strain on the lower back. Mothers, aunts, grandmothers, anyone, remember that fact, and lift to the side or carry items on the

stand with one foot resting on a low stool to support the lower back while standing at a kitchen counter or work board. Raise or lower a work surface so your shoulders and neck stay aligned.

If poor posture has become a habit, you will have to retrain muscles to take their natural positions once again. Posture exercises give strength and flexibility needed to maintain the spine's natural curves. Here are some simple but helpful exercises:

**Neck glide** To strengthen the muscles in the back of the neck, simply glide your head straight back. Keep your nose level with your ears. You are doing this exercise correctly if it gives the feeling of a double chin. Hold for 20 counts and repeat five to 10 times.

**Corner press** To strengthen the middle back muscles, stand in a corner with one hand on each wall, shoulder-width apart and at shoulder height. Slowly lower yourself toward the wall. Hold for 20 counts, press back up, and repeat five to 10 times.



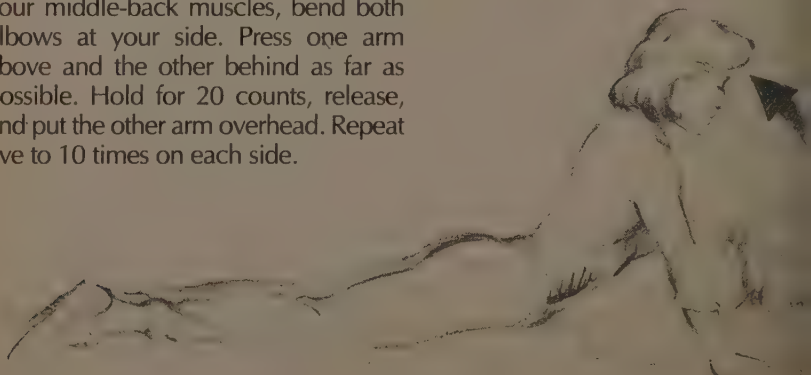
**Partial sit-ups** To strengthen the abdominal muscles (which keep the lower back aligned), lie on the floor with bent knees. Cross your arms on your chest and lift your shoulders off the ground. Hold for 20 counts and repeat five to 10 times.

**Solitude walk** Treat yourself: Go for a walk. Ask a neighbor to watch your children, go outdoors during a lunch break, or drop what you're doing and step outside. Breathe deeply and feel your lungs expand with the fresh air. Clear your head. This is not a time to solve problems or make decisions. It is a time just for you, a time to relax and feel the movement of your body as you walk. You may want to use this as the contemplative portion of your day.

**Neck stretch** To stretch the neck muscles, tilt your head to one side, putting your ear right over your shoulder. Relax and let gravity pull your head down to stretch your neck. Hold for 20 counts, and do the other side. Repeat five to 10 times on each side.



**Middle-back stretch** To strengthen your middle-back muscles, bend both elbows at your side. Press one arm above and the other behind as far as possible. Hold for 20 counts, release, and put the other arm overhead. Repeat five to 10 times on each side.



**Press-up** To stretch abdominal, and chest muscles, lie face down, hands shoulder-width apart. Get up, raising the hips, keeping the hip bones touching the floor. Hold for 20 counts, lower the body, and repeat five to 10 times.

**B**y learning how it feels to have good posture you'll develop a body awareness that helps keep your back on track throughout the day. Notice how such selfcare can boost your self-confidence and create a more positive, healthy self-image. It's the result of selfcare that must please our Creator God, who lovingly shaped our human bodies and wants us to treat them well.

You'll have more energy and less chance of backache, stiffness or injury. While learning good posture may seem strange at first, you'll be surprised how quickly it becomes a comfortable habit and how good it looks and feels.

It's not the orthopedic surgeon, chiropractor, gynecologist or health food store manager that makes the difference (although they can help). You are the one. Good posture really does work and doesn't cost a dime!

## ABOUT WOMEN

CAROLYN J. LEWIS

Esther Tse

"We need to break tradition but we do it diplomatically," says Esther Hong Kong. Tse holds a master's degree but is not ordained in the Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, which does not ordain women.

"It's not a big problem for me. I feel called and ordained by God and I care about what the system says."

"Women can make changes," she adds. "We have to be persistent; you have to be diplomatic. Modern men can do that. We can work very hard but be very persistent and very..."

Tse is currently working on an advanced theological degree at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, but early in life, she didn't expect to get beyond grade school.

Her child Tse fled with her family in 1949 from China to Hong Kong, where her mother couldn't find work and her father, unable to deal with the hard life, abandoned the family.

"I felt 'the world is so unfair,' and I contemplated suicide twice," Tse said.

"When I was 17 I felt that I needed a man. I never had a loving relationship." She began to look into religion and the

teachings of Christianity, Buddhism and Confucius. "I took Jesus seriously and made up my mind to become a Christian," she said.

She did youth work and then went to seminary. She married and came to the United States where her husband entered graduate school. She worked for two years as a full-time homemaker.

"In Hong Kong I worked 16 hours a day. In the United States I learned to play." She took up the Chinese flute, calligraphy, painting and she learned how to cook.

Her husband encouraged her to go back to seminary. Eventually they plan to return to Hong Kong where she hopes to teach in the seminary.

She wants to teach systematic theology al-

though she had been asked to teach history. "I want to teach about what women can do in the future, not what women did in the past."

She feels that there is much women can do if they work through the system. "There is no way for us to work outside the system," she said. "We have to be diplomatic as well as revolutionary."



**"Women  
can make  
changes."**





## Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

In late November presidents from the 64 Synodical Women's Organizations (SWOs) of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gathered in Chicago.

There they explored a host of planning issues related to the first year of life in Women of the ELCA, including such topics as differing leadership styles, responsibilities of presidents, the functioning and naming of clusters and conferences, regional spring workshops for SWO boards, visions for the church, the

role of communications, and more.

Many presidents voiced the sense of urgency women in their areas felt in "moving ahead with ministry." At the same time the group also agreed that a number of instances answers or solutions simply can't be known yet.

While concurring on the hard road ahead, the women gave themselves permission to "be kind to themselves in the process" and rejoice in the "good thing" God is doing in the church these days.—NJS



**W**omen of the ELCA President Jeanne Rapp (left) and Secretary Delphia Hawkins represented the women's churchwide executive board at the event. Community-building (right) was an important ingredient in the overall mix.



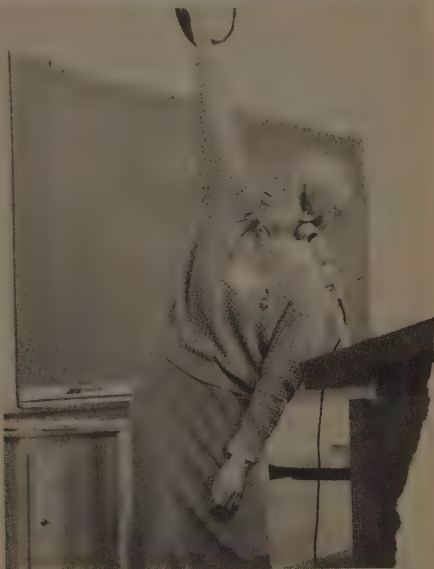


nts listen intently to a presentation.

**P**residents worked on time lines and calendars using adding machine tapes.



**B**ible study writer the Rev. Kristine Carlson set the tone for daily sessions on the book of Mark.



**T**he Rev. Corinne Chilstrom makes a point as she discusses the "Arise to Life!" Bible study with the group.



**S**mall-group discussions got down to specifics.

# SYNODICAL WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION PRESIDENTS

Every part of the community that makes up Women of the ELCA is important. The women whose names appear on these pages represent one important part of the overall community—the presidents of the Synodical Women's Organizations, or SWOs, as acronym-loving people call them.

You will want to note the name and address of the president of your own SWO. She's there to give leadership within the organization and to be of help to those in her area. Feel free to contact her.

But also feel responsible for praying for her—and all the presidents. They have assumed a major challenge as Women of the ELCA takes shape. Speak their names before God often.

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# REVIEWS



"Look to your feet," Mr. Great-Heart told the flagging travelers as they neared the Celestial City in **Pilgrim's Progress**, that's exactly what authors Phyllis Keri and Louise Williams have done. Through the use of Scripture, personal reflections, and gently probing questions, their book **Talented, Tired, Beautiful Feet: A Bible Study for Women** (Good and Beautiful, 1985), offers possibilities for use as a personal devotional tool, a basis for group discussion and study, and an outline for writing a spiritual journal.

With feet as metaphor, the reader can explore her faith journey, her talents and gifts, and the meaning of walking in the rhythm of community. Our Bible study group at Good Shepherd, Brooklyn, Ohio, found the text of **Beautiful Feet** thought-provoking and creative as it guided us to consider the Spirit's work in our lives.

The authors let their imaginations soar with the symbol. The result is a delightful experience, in spite of—or perhaps partly because of—the inevitable groaning at some of the puns in the "foot ailments" section.

Though most Christians are more familiar with heart or hands as the corporeal symbol of where and how faith works, it turns out that feet can be an ideal image for the spiritual journey.

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news," Isaiah told us. This book helps us see just how beautiful.

—Judy Hoshek

# MARCH

1

2

3

Jewish Feast of Purim

4

World Day of Prayer

5

6

Women's History Week begins

7

Perpetua and her companions, martyrs at Carthage, d. 202

8

9

10

11

12

Jane Delano, founder of American Red Cross Nursing Service, b. 1862

13

International Women's Day

14

15

16

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19

20

21

International Day for the Elimination of Racism

22

23

24

25

The Annunciation of Our Lord

26

27

Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday)

28

29

30

31

Maundy Thursday

## Editor's Notes

Two hundred and seventy-five thousand strong. That's us. That's how many of us subscribed to, and received, the first issue of **Lutheran Woman Today**, according to the circulation department. And the figures are rising daily.

Such is the kind of news that boosts our spirits, and strikes terror into the heart of an editor.

Delights because what editor in his right mind doesn't want a strong crop of subscribers who support their magazine. Further, how delicious the thought of all those readers studying the book of Mark, reading "About Women," learning the potential of "Selfcare" and exploring the depth of meaning found in Women of the ELCA's purpose statement. Who knows where it all might lead?

Strikes terror because, if one looks too closely, the responsibility hangs over the head, immense, awesome. Not to mention the challenge of meeting the tremendously diverse needs and interests that 275,000 of us must have. Pogo put his finger squarely on the issue when he confessed he could manage life's problems all right but he wasn't so sure he could take "insurmountable opportunities."

Fortunately for editors—and for readers—there are writers for the magazine who each issue grab hold of those insurmountable opportunities with insight, style, and grace.

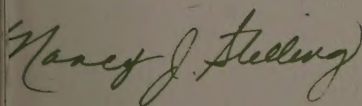


instance, how deftly, simply,  
ively this issue's "Season's Best"  
rs shape their story and call forth  
s we contemplate how our lives  
hrist's intersect.  
d Frog and Toad in "The Garden"  
d us, in wonderfully childlike  
n, that the increase comes from  
e ourselves and our efforts.

Lary Ylvisaker Nilsen's article and  
ar on discipleship underscore a  
r thought, offering a rich insight  
ears further reflection: Making  
les, she says, "involves concen-  
g on making better disciples of  
ives, then trusting God to use our  
and our story, in whatever way  
chooses to spread the gospel to  
around us."

at a marvelously freeing thought,  
ially for those of us on whom the  
nsibility of discipleship, or the  
mountability of opportunity, may  
es weigh heavy.

e truth is, as always, that it is  
doing. It is God's mission. It is  
growth. It is God's action. How  
erful to be in the company and  
nunity of some 275,000 whom  
may choose to use.



EDITOR

## PREVIEW

# EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

Defined by one seventh-grader as "what makes the El train run," the Holy Spirit, says Gladys Moore, has winds that "may sting and smart well into the next century."

## SELF-TALK

The words we tell ourselves both shape and reveal how we think of ourselves. "Selfcare" looks at the all-too-often negative words we speak to ourselves and tests positive alternatives.

## ABOUT WOMEN

Inside every woman lies a fascinating feature story. In April, "About Women" profiles three Minnesota women.

## ARE YOU MY SISTER?

Women in prison and those released from prison often are searching for a community which the church can provide.

Consult your congregational **Lutheran Woman Today** coordinator about subscriptions. Or send \$6.50 for a 1-year subscription to: LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY, 426 S. Fifth St., Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440.



*As a community of women  
created in the image of God,  
called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and  
empowered by the Holy Spirit,*

*We commit ourselves to  
grow in faith,  
affirm our gifts,  
support one another in our callings,  
engage in ministry and action, and  
promote healing and wholeness  
in the church, the society,  
and the world.*

Purpose Statement,  
Women of the ELCA

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